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## **VIETNAM | Religious Freedom Advocate Wins Writer's Award**

Vietnamese Catholic blogger and religious freedom advocate Nguyen Huu Vinh has been awarded the Hellman/Hammett award for writers facing political persecution. Nguyen Huu Vinh (also known as Jean Baptiste Nguyen Huu Vinh) was among 41 people selected for the Hellman/Hammett award administered by the human rights NGO Human Rights Watch.

Nguyen Huu Vinh has written poems, blog posts and reports on a broad range of sensitive issues, including land confiscation and disputes, police brutality, and restrictions on the right to freedom of religion. He has also been vocal on controversial topics such as Hanoi-Vatican relations, official corruption, and Hanoi's response to the South China Sea dispute with Beijing.

As a result, Nguyen Huu Vinh has been questioned by police numerous times and is under close surveillance. He has also been assaulted twice; most recently, in July 2012. He was attacked by knife-wielding thugs after taking part in and blogging about an anti-China rally in Hanoi.

In September, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) expressed concern over the sentencing of three Catholic bloggers whose heavy sentences highlight a broader pattern of restriction on freedom of expression in Vietnam. Human Rights Watch has criticized the Vietnamese government for suppressing freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and for persecuting those who question or criticize the government.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at CSW said, "We congratulate Mr. Nguyen Huu Vinh on receiving this prestigious award for his dedicated writing on human rights and freedom of religion in Vietnam. As the government continues to restrict freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, writers like Nguyen Huu Vinh play a crucial role in monitoring and spreading information about the actions of those in authority. CSW calls on the government of Vietnam to cease harassment of human rights activists in Vietnam and to release all religious and political prisoners of conscience".